

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 EB-07 DOTE-00 FMC-01 DLOS-04 IO-11

SAM-01 /092 W

----- 121576

R 091640Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8125

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY NOUKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY RABAT

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, ELTN, NG, DM

SUBJ: NIGER AND BENIN PRESIDENTS MEET: DISCUSS TRANSPORT
PROBLEM AGAIN

SUMMARY: ON FEB 8 PRES SENYI KOUNTCHE OF NIGER FLEW TO PARAKOU
IN CENTRAL BENIN FOR ONE-DAY VISIT WITH PRES KEREKOU.
PRINCIPAL TOPIC WAS THE CONTINUED SERIOUS PROBLEM OF NIGER'S
ACCESS TO THE SEA VIA THE NIAMEY-COTONOU ROAD/RAIL LINK AND
THE PORT OF COTONOU. KOUNTHCE ACKNOWLEDGED PUBLICLY THAT NIGER
IS NO LONGER SOLELY DEPENDENT ON PORT OF COTONOU, BUT WILL NOW
ALSO USE PORTS OF LOME AND ABIDJAN. JOINT COMMUNIQUE AT END
OF VISIT DEALT WITH VARIETY OF TOPICS INCLUDING ANGOLA,
SPANISH SAHARA AND NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER. LIKE
EARLIER MEETINGS BETWEEN THESE TWO PRESIDENTS ON NIGER'S
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TRANSPORT COMPLAINTS. THERE IS NO REASON TO SUPPOSE THAT

THIS ONE WILL HAVE BENEFICIAL RESULTS.

1. NIGER'S PRES KOUNTCHE FLEW TO PARAKOU IN CENTRAL BENIN FOR A ONE-DAY MEETING FEB 8 WITH BENIN'S PRES KEREKOU. THOUGH THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE AT THE END OF THE MEETING DEALT WITH A MULTIPLE OF SUBJECTS, BOTH PRESIDENTS INDICATED (KEREKOU ONLY IMPLIED) IN STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS FOLLOWING THE SESSION THAT IT IS THE LONG FESTERING PROBLEM OF NIGER'S ACCESS ROUTE TO THE SEA THAT BROUGHT KOUNTCHE TO BENIN. KOUNTCHE SAID IN A RADIO INTERVIEW THE TWO COUNTRIES ARE "CONDEMNED TO LIVE TOGETHER" AND THEREFORE COOPERATION MUST BE FRUITFUL IN THE INTEREST OF BOTH THE BENINESE AND NIGERIEN PEOPLE. WHEN ASKED BY A REPORTER TO EXPLAIN HOW THIS COOPERATION SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED, KOUNTCHE EXPLAINED THAT THE COTONOU/PARAKOU/MALANVILLE/GAYA AXIS IS NIGER'S UMBILICAL CORD AND THAT STRENGTHENING OF COOPERATION MEANT TOP PRIORITY HAD TO BE GIVEN TO THE MOVEMENT OF SUPPLIES FROM THE PORT OF COTONOU ALONG THAT AXIS TO NIGER. EVERYTHING MUST BE DONE TO AVOID RUPTURES IN THIS SERVICE AND TO SET UP A PRICE STRUCTURE FOR THE TRANSPORT OF GOODS WHICH DOES NOT WORK AGAINST THE NIGERIEN CONSUMER.

2. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION ABOUT REPORTS THAT NIGER INTENDS TO SIGN TRANSPORT AGREEMENTS WITH OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES, KOUNTCHE NOTED THAT BENIN IS NIGER'S NORMAL ROUTE OF SUPPLY AND THAT THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF NIGER HINGES ON THE PORTS OF ABIDJAN AND LOME. KOUNTCHE SAID HE TOLD KEREKOU, "ONE MUST HAVE MORE THAN ONE STRING FOR HIS BOW. IF IT BREAKS, BY THE TIME ANOTHER IS FOUND, THE ENEMY HAS ALREADY DONE HIS DAMAGE. IT IS NOT BECAUSE WE DESIRE TO HAVE SOME SPARE STRINGS THAT WE WILL DROP OUR NORMAL AXIS. IT IS BECAUSE THE NORMAL ROUTE HAS BEEN AT TIMES DISPUTED THAT NIGER HAS SOUGHT OTHER OUTLETS. NIGER DOES NOT INTEND TO TURN AWAY FROM BENIN."

3. UPON RETURNING TO COTONOU KEREKOU CLAIMED TO PRESS THAT KOUNTCHE BROUGHT HIS PROBLEMS TO THE MEETING AND HE, KEREKOU, FURNISHED THE SOLUTIONS. HE SAID HE HAD INSTRUCTED BENINESE "TECHNICIANS" WHO HAD BEEN BLOCKING "NORMAL EVOLUTION" TO CARRY OUT THEIR DUTIES BECAUSE HE DOES NOT WISH TO BE BOTHERED FURTHER WITH NIGER'S PROBLEMS. KEREKOU SAID THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR THE FIRST TIME "WE HAVE WORKED CORRECTLY WITH ANOTHER CHIEF OF STATE..." "I HAVE NEVER HAD SUCH AN EXCELLENT MEETING WITH A CHIEF OF STATE."

4. FINAL COMMUNIQUE REFLECTS LITTLE OF ACTUAL PURPOSE OF THE MEETING. IT DOES NOTE THAT BOTH SIDES INTEND TO REENFORCE THEIR COOPERATION AND THAT THEY RECOGNIZE THE NEED TO INCREASE TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. TO THIS END THE JOINT

BENIN-NIGER COMMISSION IS TO MEET IN COTONOU BEGINNING FEB 23 TO STUDY WAYS AND MEANS OF QUICKLY AND ADEQUATELY CARRYING OUT "COOPERATIVE PROJECTS".

5. ON AFRICAN ISSUES THE TWO PRESIDENTS "RENEWED THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE MPLA; NOTED WITH SATISFACTION THE MPLA'S MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC SUCCESS; CONDEMNED THE INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA OF THE IMPERIALIST, REACTIONARY AND RACIST FORCES; DENOUNCED WITH VEHEMENCE THE PROPENSITY OF THE IMPERIALIST POWERS TO TURN PEACEFUL AFRICA INTO A PLACE OF HATRED AND FRATRICIDAL STRUGGLES." THE TWO CHIEFS OF STATE EXPRESSED "THEIR CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION IN WESTERN SAHARA AND ARE CONVINCED THAT THE ONLY EQUITABLE SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM IS SELF-DETERMINATION." COMMUNIQUE ALSO EXPRESSES SUPPORT FOR A NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER AND ADHESION TO PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPING NATIONS' SOVEREIGNTY OVER THEIR NATURAL RESOURCES AND RIGHT TO SELL THEIR PRODUCTS AT A JUST PRICE.

6. COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT TO TELL FROM BENINESE MEDIA ACCOUNTS THAT THE MAIN ISSUE WAS TRANSPORT. THE EXPRESSION "COMMERCIAL EXCHANGES" IS THE CLOSEST THE GOVT NEWSPAPER EHUZU COMES TO MENTIONING TRANSPORT. ONLY KOUNTCHE'S RADIO STATEMENTS MAKE CLEAR THAT TRANSPORT WAS REASON FOR HIS VISIT.

7. IT IS NOTED THAT KEREKOU BLAMES BENINESE "TECHNICIANS" FOR "BLOCKING NORMAL EVOLUTION." (I.E. NOT IMPLEMENTING THE TRADITIONAL TRANSPORT COOPERATION ARRANGEMENTS.) THIS IS TYPICAL KEREKOU REGIME TACTIC FOR WASHING ITS HANDS OF RESPONSIBILITY. REGIME'S OFFICIAL LINE IS THAT IT DOES NOT HAVE TO ACCEPT BLAME FOR ANYTHING ITS AGENTS DO OR FAIL TO DO.

8. NIGER'S CONCERNS OVER BENIN'S DISREGARD FOR ITS VITAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INTEREST IN A RELIABLE FREIGHT TRANSIT SYSTEM BETWEEN COTONOU AND NIAMEY ARE OF LONG STANDING. THEY HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF SEVERAL PREVIOUS MEETINGS BETWEEN THESE TWO PRESIDENTS, ALWAYS AT KOUNTCHE'S INITIATIVE. NONE OF THEM HAS RESULTED IN AN IMPROVED SITUATION. NOR IS THERE ANY REASON TO BELIEVE THIS ONE WILL HAVE A DIFFERENT OUTCOME.

9. SHARPNESS OF THE COMMUNIQUE'S LANGUAGE ON ANGOLA, "IMPERIALISTS," ETC. SUGGESTS THAT THOSE PORTIONS WERE WRITTEN BY THE BENINESE. INCLUSION OF BENIN'S RADICAL VIEWS IN COMMUNIQUE MAY HAVE BEEN PART OF THE QUID PRO QUO FOR PROMISES OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE TRANSPORT SITUATION. END COMMENT

10. WILL REPORT FURTHER WHEN WE HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITY OBTAIN VIEWS OF NIGER'S PERMREP IN COTONOU WHO TOOK PART.

ENGLE

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